



WALLACE BURNS

With Pine Creek ten or twelve miles of the city, afire all through the latter part of July and the first of August, and with numerous fires to the south, just across the St. Joe divide, the people of Wallace were badly worried. On August 14, a newspaper reporter stated that all insurance men had all their clerks busy writing fire insurance policies, but were not refusing any business. On August 20, a high wind arose about noon. All existing fires flared up, and new ones were started. Great thunderheads showed to the south and west, as the fires rushed to uncontrollable proportions. It was obvious that a holocaust was impending.

Since the greatest danger to Wallace was from fire coming down Placer Creek, Supervisor Weigle took a saddle horse and started up the creek to reconnoiter. He was caught in the rush of the fire, and had to abandon the horse and take refuge in a mine tunnel. He did not succeed in getting back to Wallace until 10:30 that night, with his eyebrows and clothes scorched from his close encounter with the flames.

With the adjacent hillsides all ablaze, the fire broke into town at 9:15 Saturday night. The whole eastern part of the city burned, and before the flames were under control by the fire department, approximately one hundred buildings were burned, with an estimated loss of one million dollars. Two lives were lost in the fire.

A relief train on the Northern Pacific started from Wallace about 10:00 p.m. loaded with women and children. They picked up many more refugees at Mullan and Saltese, and arrived in Missoula Sunday morning.

All day Sunday new reports of terrible loss of life came in, as the scorched and burned survivors of various firefighting crews stumbled wearily into town, with tales of terror and disaster.

The terrific uprush of fire from the St. Joe drainage across the divide caught every firefighting crew in that territory, and they were doomed unless they could find a safe place to weather the blast of flame. The story of each of the seven Coeur d'Alene crews caught in the fire is taken from Supervisor Weigle's report of June 24, 1911.

Excerpt from the collection of "When The Mountains Roared", (page 44-46) USDA Forest Service